

5. Visual Resources

Setting

Overall Visual Character. The visual character of the Plan area is currently defined by two linear, developed cores along Interstate 80 and Highway 49 with the City of Auburn as a focal point. It is surrounded by typical rural Sierra Nevada foothills landscape, which includes the American River canyon area to the east and rural residential lands to the north, south, and west. Approximately 39% of City limits (Auburn General Plan, Table IV-2, p. IV-9) is currently built out in urban land uses (commercial, office, industrial, residential parcels less than two acres in size). Within the Sphere of Influence, urbanization is significantly less.

Unique / High Quality Visual Features. Certain visual features in the Plan area are unique or of particularly high visual quality, helping define the City's character. These features include:

- The American River canyon
- Rural open spaces
- Cultural and historic features
- Characteristic landforms, including rolling hills, steep slopes and backdrop ridgelines
- Woodlands
- Streams and riparian areas
- Scenic corridors and viewsheds of major roadways and others that are visually important to the character of the Auburn area including:

Table 5-1
MAJOR VISUAL FEATURES
CITY OF AUBURN SCENIC CORRIDORS AND HEAVILY-TRAVELLED ROADWAYS

Within City Limits	Within or Extending into the Existing Sphere of Influence, outside of City Limits	Within or Extending into the New Sphere of Influence
Interstate 80* Highway 49 (south)* Indian Hill Road* Auburn Folsom Road* Auburn Ravine Road Marguerite Mine Road Nevada Street* Shirland Tract Road Palm Avenue*	Interstate 80* Highway 49 (south)* Indian Hill Road* Foresthill Road* Shirland Tract Road Mt. Vernon Road Atwood Road Edgewood Road Ophir Road* Bell Road/West Bell Road* Joeger Road West Dry Creek Road	Interstate 80* Highway 49 (south)* Auburn Folsom Road* Bell Road/West Bell Road* Haines Road Dry Creek Rd/West Dry Creek Rd Mt. Vernon Road Atwood Road Bald Hill Road Wise Road New Airport Road (north of Bell) Old Airport Road

* Indicates a heavily travelled road.

**Impact
Evaluation
Criteria**

IMPACT EVALUATION CRITERIA: The level of significance of visual change is based on a number of factors including number of viewers, their level of concern, the quality of the existing views and whether or not they are unique to the area. All of these factors combined result in the level of change which can be tolerated by viewers. These factors are rated for various features in the Plan area below.

Table 5-2
DEGREE OF VISUAL CHANGE TOLERABLE BY VIEWERS

	# Viewers	Existing Quality of Views	Level of Concern	Change Tolerable
1. Overall Visual Character				
- Rural areas	High	High	High	Low
- Urban areas (including urban fringe)	High	Degraded, Moderate + High (Moderate overall)	Moderate to High	Moderate
2. Unique Visual Features				
- Open space	High	High	High	Low
- American River* Cyn	High	High	High	Low
- Landforms	High	High	High	Low
- Streams* + riparian corrid.	Varies	High	High	Low
- Scenic corridors*	High	High	High	Low
- Viewsheds of heavily traveled roads (see list)	High	High to Moderate	High	Low to Moderate
- Individual* communities	High	Moderate	High	Low to Moderate
- Cultural/historic* features	Varies	High	High	Low

* Unique views.

In addition, the Plan contains a number of goals, policies and implementation measures related to visual impacts.

Table 5-3
AUBURN GENERAL PLAN
RELEVANT VISUAL GOALS, POLICIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION MEASURES

LAND USE - General

Goal 1: Guide development in a pattern that will minimize land use conflicts between adjacent land users.

Policies

- 1.1 Design industrial/commercial business uses to be compatible with adjacent land uses, including, but not limited to, siting, height, orientation, materials, landscaping, circulation, grading, setbacks proportion, and architecture.
- 1.2 Design multi-family residential projects to minimize impacts on adjacent land uses.

Goal 2: Encourage maintaining the open rural character of the County areas beyond the City of Auburn sphere of Influence so that Auburn is a distinct, readily identifiable foothill community. Encourage farmsteads, orchards, tree farms, grazing, and horse ranches.

Policy

- 2.1 Actively promote and preserve agricultural use on lands in the regional area.

Goal 3: Guide development so that it takes advantage of Auburn's unique character including, but not limited to, terrain and vegetation.

Policies

- 3.1 Minimize disturbance to terrain by limiting "pads" on steep slopes to reduce cut and fill.
- 3.2 Minimize disturbance to terrain by encouraging that roads follow the existing topography.
- 3.3 Utilize the policies in the Open Space and Conservation Element to create and maintain a visual variety.
- 3.4 Develop, adopt, and implement a hillside development ordinance.

LAND USE - Commercial

Goal 6: Discourage extension of strip commercial development and encourage future commercial infill development.

Policies

- 6.1 Avoid linear commercial development designs.
- 6.2 Encourage commercial design that utilizes existing topography, minimizing cut and fill.

Cont.

6.3 Promote aesthetics suitable to the foothill environment.

6.4 Develop landscape maintenance and lighting districts in commercial zones.

Policy

7.2 Neighborhood centers should be designed to minimize impacts on adjacent uses through site design, access and parking, landscaping and lighting standards.

LAND USE - Industrial

Goal 8: Provide for the development of industrial areas where suitable land and services exist and with a minimum of land use conflicts.

LAND USE - Public

Policy

10.4 The Auburn General Plan and zoning designations for annexed land should consider the following criteria:

- b. The environmental effects that development on lands proposed for annexation may have on properties within the exiting city limits.
- c. Existing land uses, if any, on and in the vicinity of the annexed land.
- d. The extent of any natural habitats and features of the landscape which should be preserved.

Implementation:

- A. The City shall prepare design guidelines for commercial and industrial development proposals.
- B. The City shall prepare and adopt a hillside development ordinance to address disturbance into the terrain including elements such as "pads" on steep slopes, roads to follow topography, and fencing on steep slopes.
- D. The City shall adopt Landscape and Lighting Districts in residential and commercial areas.

**CONSERVATION AND
OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

Goal 1: Preserve areas of natural vegetation, trees, topographic features, wildlife habitat, and riparian corridors.

Policies

- 1.1 Identify, protect and enhance natural, riparian wildlife habitat and vegetation areas and encourage preservation and maintenance of these areas in as natural a state as possible.
- 1.2 Adopt and implement a tree ordinance in order to focus attention on the importance of preserving existing native vegetation.

Con.

- 1.8 Encourage preservation and protection from urban encroachment the rural/ agricultural areas in the Auburn community outside the Plan area.

Goal 2: Minimize adverse development impacts to the natural environment.

Policies

- 2.1 Develop, adopt and implement a hillside development ordinance. (LU 3.4)
- 2.6 Encourage development of all building sites and residences in a manner minimizing disturbance to natural terrain and vegetation and maximizing preservation of natural beauty and open space.

Goal 3: Identify, protect and enhance open areas and greenbelts throughout the planning area for the protection of wildlife and for use and enjoyment by residents and visitors.

Policies

- 3.1 Encourage both private and public ownership and maintenance of open space.
- 3.2 Provide for greenbelts or linear open spaces which shall be preserved to enhance developed areas as well as to maintain clear boundaries of the Auburn community.
- 3.3 Encourage planned unit developments as a means of preserving open space within and adjacent to residential developments.
- 3.4 The City shall require that all designated open space areas within a project be zoned for open space use in perpetuity.
- 3.5 The City, where possible, shall require open space areas to be linked together by providing additional open space areas or at a minimum provide connections using trails, banks of creeks, and rights-of-way.

Policy 5.4

- c. Major Ridge Tops: Ridge tops offer outstanding scenic value and have the potential to be linked to existing trails. Development should not detract from the overall viewshed quality of and from the ridge top.
- d. Riparian Corridors: The design, construction, and management of proposed trails and pathways within riparian corridors should be carefully executed in order to reduce environmental disturbance. Bridges and other public improvements should be designed to provide safe and secure routes for trails, including grade separations between roads and trails, when feasible.

Goal 6: Protect visual resources.

Policies

- 6.1 Enhance and protect scenic resources visible from scenic routes¹ in the Auburn area.
- 6.2 Encourage anti-litter, beautification and cleanup programs along all routes.¹

Cont.

- 6.3 Coordinate with Placer County and Caltrans the establishment of a beautification program for the Highway 49 corridor.
- 6.4 Maintain and promote heavily vegetated corridors along circulation routes. Roads and other public works projects shall incorporate beauty as well as utility, safety and economy.
- 6.5 Encourage and use existing City and County programs for protection and enhancement of scenic corridors, including, but not limited to, design review, sign control, landscaping and mounting, undergrounding utilities, scenic setbacks, density limitations.
- 6.6 The City shall require that all landscape plantings are to be maintained continually in a healthy and attractive condition.

Goal 7: Conserve, protect and enhance water supplies and adequately plan for the development and protection of these resources and their related resources for future generations.

Policies

- 7.4 Adopt an ordinance to protect and enhance waterways, stream channels, and intermittent streams.
- 7.5 Where feasible, keep waterways in their natural state, rather than concrete-lined or placed underground.
- 7.6 Encourage appropriate setbacks for building sites from natural waterways.

Implementation:

- A. The City shall prepare design and adopt a Tree Ordinance.
- B. The City shall prepare and adopt an Open Space Ordinance to zone open space use in perpetuity.
- C. The City shall prepare and adopt a Stream, Canal and Waterway Protection Ordinance.
- G. The City shall include measures to protect visual resources along scenic corridors in the update of the Zoning Ordinance.
- J. The City shall amend the Landscape Ordinance to establish a maintenance and enforcement program.

Impacts

- 1. **Overall change in visual character of the area.** At buildout under the Plan, an overall degree of urbanization throughout the Plan area will be noticeable to residents. Urbanization over the entire Plan area (defined here as commercial, industrial, mixed use, and residential development of less than 0.5 du/ac) could total approximately 52% (see Table 5-4 below). Most of this new urbanization will occur within the Sphere of Influence outside of the existing urban area and on infill sites within the City limits.

Table 5-4
URBANIZATION AT PLAN BUILDOUT
(based upon Plan data)

Development Category	Within City Limits			Within Sphere of Influence				Total Plan Area		
	Acres	Total Acres	% Urb-aniza-tion	Acres	Total Acres	% Urb-aniza-tion	Acres	Total Acres	% Urb-aniza-tion	
Urban Land Designations										
Low Density Residential	560			1608			842	3010		
Urban Low Density Residential	1120			1282			58	2460		
Low Medium Density Residential	250			30			0	280		
Medium Density Residential	120			390			0	510		
High Density Residential	240			0			0	240		
Mixed Use	240			310			0	580		
Commercial	340			472			28	840		
Industrial	470			332			478	1280		
Totals	3370	4830	70%	4424	7336	60%	1406	5534	25%	
								9200	52%	
Non-Urban Land Designations										
Agriculture	0			0			80	80		
Urban Reserve ¹	410			0			0	410		
Rural Density Residential	270			898			2592	3710		
Open Space										
Open Space Schools										
Open Space Private	780			2014			1506	4300		
Totals	1460	4830	30%	2912	7336	40%	4128	5534	75%	
								8500	48%	

¹ Assumes 1 du/5 ac minimum. See discussion in Land Use chapter.

¹ Assumes 1 du/5 ac minimum. See discussion in Land Use chapter.

Within the City Limits

Full buildout of the Plan area will result in a much more urban feeling, as remaining City parcels are developed. This is due to the relatively large quantity of developable vacant land that currently exists within the City as well as areas of increased land use density (see Land Use chapter). The degree of change expected can be rated moderate to high weighed against an overall degree of tolerance for a moderate level of change by residents. As a result, impacts are expected to be significant.

Within the Existing Sphere of Influence

Within the existing Sphere, outside of the City limits, the Plan buildout will result in a much more urban feeling to currently rural lands. Of most concern are the areas of the Sphere designated for one acre parcels, such as the Mt. Vernon, West Dry Creek, and Joeger areas. Although often less visually impacting in wooded areas, one acre lot development throughout this relatively open, visually-exposed land will produce a loss of the rural character that now typifies these low foothill areas. The one acre parcelization will extend urbanization to areas below the western Auburn ridgelines which currently marks the edge of urbanization. The Open Space Clustering Overlay applied to this area will reduce impacts to certain localized features. It is likely, however, to be offset by the increased density of developed areas (greater than one du/ac) resulting from this clustering, which is not typical of these areas today. In addition, large expanses of open space are not expected to be preserved by clustering in these areas because of the relatively small parcel sizes which exist today.

Also of concern are the proposed LDR-CD-OSP developments along the American River canyon, north of Foresthill Road and north of Highway 49. The development of these areas at the prescribed density may result in additional urbanized views visible to the American River canyon area.

In many areas, the degree of change can be characterized as moderate to high, weighed against an overall degree of tolerance for a low to moderate degree of change by residents (depending on proximity to the urban area). Impacts are expected to be significant.

Within the New Sphere of Influence

Visual impacts to areas of the new Sphere will be similar in character to those discussed within the existing Sphere. Areas of concern are the Mt. Vernon, Joeger, west Bell areas, including lands along Bald Hill Road where one acre parcels are proposed.

In these areas, the expected visual impacts will result from the combination of three inter-related aspects:

- The density proposed as viewed against the backdrop of the surrounding, very rural lands (a significant increase);

- The artificial appearance resulting from abrupt density shifts occurring along the new Sphere limit line. At lower densities (five acre lots as an example) this break would be less visually impacting for a number of reasons:
 - typically low percentage of land covered by structures;
 - typically less solid fencing of property lines;
 - Fewer roads needed to access lots

These aspects tend to preserve rural character and create a visually less-distinct line between suburban and rural areas;

- Creation of a suburban as opposed to a rural character of development, a substantial change from existing conditions.

The Bell Road corridor is currently open and rural in nature. Though an open space setback is proposed along Bell Road, the industrial uses would still be visible from the road. This would represent a significant change in the visual character of the corridor.

The Ophir Road area is proposed for industrial uses. In addition, the sewage treatment plant site is designated Industrial/Public. This is an area of steep wooded slopes as well as riparian vegetation within Auburn Ravine. It serves as the entry to the Ophir area. Without special design treatment, industrial development could significantly alter the visual quality of this area. (There are no proposals to expand the physical area of the sewage treatment plant.) Clustering and extensive open space retention are recommended in the Land Use and Biotic Resources chapters of this EIR to mitigate potential impacts.

The degree of change expected within these areas can be rated moderate to high, weighed against an overall degree of tolerance for a low level of change by residents.

Conclusion:

The Community Plan contains goals, policies, and implementation which will assist in reducing visual impacts of Plan development. Within the existing City limits, it is expected that these programs, such as industrial design guidelines, Hillside Development and Tree Ordinances, if definitively written, will help to create a high level of community design. As areas are annexed, these City regulations will also apply. However, within the full proposed Sphere of Influence (existing and additional areas), the degree of change expected due to overall urbanization cannot be mitigated and is inevitable result of even the most orderly growth at the densities proposed.

2. Existing agricultural lands and open spaces. Plan impacts on the extent of agricultural lands are described in the Land Use chapter. Agricultural lands within the proposed Sphere of Influence are not significant. However, views

of expansive, large parcel open spaces outside the core urban area will be significantly decreased as residential areas build out within the Sphere of Influence. A low to moderate level of change can be expected in these areas weighed against a low level of change which is expected to be tolerated by viewers in these areas. As a result, impacts are not expected to be significant.

Conclusion:

Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, impacts to agricultural lands within the proposed Sphere of Influence are not expected to be significant.

3. **American River canyon.** The steep river canyon will be protected by an Open Space designation.

Conclusion:

Based on the impact evaluation criteria and the discussion above, impacts to American River canyon are expected to be less than significant.

4. **Landforms.** Impacts to landforms are discussed in the Geology/ Landforms chapter of this EIR. Impacts are expected to be significant but mitigatable.

Conclusion:

See Geology/Landforms chapter for detail.

5. **Streams and riparian areas.** These features are discussed in the Biotic Resources chapter which notes that disruption of these areas would result in significant impacts. Since these are visually unique areas, this conclusion would apply to visual impacts as well. The Plan specifies the creation of a Stream Protection Ordinance. The Biotic Resources chapter recommends additional detail be added to the text calling for this ordinance to ensure protection of these biotic and visual resources.

Conclusion:

Based on the impact evaluation criteria and the discussion above, impacts to streams and riparian areas are expected to be significant but mitigatable through specific policy language specified in the Biotic Mitigation Measures chapter of this EIR.

6. **Scenic corridors.** Proposed land use densities in areas discussed under Impact #1 of this section may affect the visual integrity of a number of scenic corridors:

Within City Limits

- Impacts of residential and industrial development on hillsides along Marguerite Mine and Auburn Ravine Roads
- Mixed Use development impacts to the north/south ridge between Highway 49 and Nevada Street, and Industrial uses along north Nevada Street

New and Existing Sphere of Influence

- Impacts of residential development on the Bell Road Corridor
- Impacts of one acre lotting on the Mt. Vernon and Atwood Road corridors
- Impacts of commercial development within Mixed Use area on Indian Hill Road
- Tree loss impacts within Maidu/Indian Hill Road Mixed Use area

Conclusion:

Based on the impact evaluation criteria and the discussion above, impacts to scenic corridors are expected to be significant both within City limits and the Sphere of Influence. Mitigation measures are proposed for corridors within the City limits, which would reduce impacts to a less than significant level ~~except for Area F/28. This area as well as the~~ However, impacts to corridors outside of the City limits, within the existing and new Spheres, are expected to be unmitigable. (See related discussion under Impact #1.)

Ref:
Final EIR, p.49

7. **Viewsheds of heavily travelled roads.** Figure 5-1 overlays proposed land use designations on the Plan's Viewshed map. Impacts to these areas are discussed in the Landforms/Geology chapter of this EIR relative to the primary concern of landform disturbance and accompanying vegetation loss. Other potential impacts may be avoided via implementation of the Plan's design ordinances required to be developed as a part of the Plan.

Conclusion:

See Geology/Landforms chapter.

8. **Viewshed of the Russell Road overpass on/off ramp.** The wooded, undeveloped land north and south of the Russell Road overpass (between Lincoln and I-80) provide a unique rural change to the urbanized nature of other freeway on ramps in the Auburn area. It also represents a natural visual buffer between existing residential development and the roadway. The visual quality of both sides of the road is high; the gently sloping land to the south is very high. The Plan specifies high density residential and mixed use land uses for this area, which could eliminate vegetation and lower the visual character of this area.

Conclusion:

Based upon the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, impacts to this area are expected to be significant but mitigable, using the measures prescribed.

9. **Cultural/historic resources.** These resources are discussed in detail in the Cultural Resources chapter of the EIR. To summarize, the Plan area's cultural resource include archaeological remains, structures, outbuildings, non-structural remains, remnants of orchards, ditches, flumes, etc. which all

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contribute to the essential visual nature of the Plan area. While the Plan's policies call for protection of these resources it is expected that there will be a cumulative loss of these resources. It was concluded that impacts are expected to be significant and unmitigable.

The following discussion from Final p. 49 resulted from changes made by the Planning Commission to the draft Plan:

Ref:
Final
EIR,
p.49

Although certain changes increase visual impacts, the changes made to the City of Auburn General Plan combine to produce a slight overall reduction in the level of visual impact expected. However, this level of reduction, while beneficial to the community character, will not offset the overall change in character that will occur due to the buildout of the Plan.

This change in character, which the EIR notes as the "inevitable result of even the most orderly growth at the densities proposed", remains unmitigable.

Conclusion:

See Cultural Resources chapter.

10. **Cumulative City plus County buildout.** As discussed, buildout per the City Plan is expected to result in significant unmitigable impacts. Combined with projected buildout within the County Sphere, this conclusion would not change.

Conclusion:

Based on the impact evaluation criteria and discussion above, cumulative impacts are expected to be significant and unmitigable.

**Mitigation
Measures**

1. **Overall change in visual character of area. None recommended.**

Effectiveness of Measure: This impact is considered unmitigable.

2. **Agricultural lands and open spaces.** See measures related to agricultural land impacts in the Land Use chapter.

Effectiveness of Measure: These measures are expected to reduce impacts to agricultural lands below the significant level. However, loss of open lands in general is expected to be significant and unmitigable.

3. **American River canyon. None recommended.**

Effectiveness of Measure: This impact is considered less than significant.

4. **Landforms.** See Geology/Landforms chapter.

5. **Streams and riparian areas.** See Biotic Resources chapter.

6. **Scenic corridors.**

- 6a. **Designate additional scenic corridors in Plan text:**

- Indian Hill Road
- Marguerite Mine Road
- Nevada Street

- Ophir Road
- Mt. Vernon Road
- Atwood Road

6b. Delineate scenic corridors on Land Use Map and Zoning Maps.

6c. Add detail to Implementation Measure G in the OS/Conservation Element calling for specific guidelines for each corridor:

- Landscaped roadway setbacks
- Architecture and planting materials specific to individual corridors
- Building setbacks appropriate to the character of the corridor. (Larger lot sizes of range allowed, directly adjacent to corridor, may be required.)
- Structure access and siting guidelines for development within viewsheds

Ref:
Final EIR, p.50

- Include appropriate visual mitigation measures from the Nevada Street Rezoning EIR

6d. Apply measures from Geology/Landforms chapter.

6e. Apply measures from Biotic Resources chapter.

Effectiveness of Measure: These measures are expected to reduce visual impacts to scenic corridors within the City limits to a less than significant level, except for Area F/28. For this area and areas within the Sphere of Influence, impacts are expected to be unmitigable.

Ref:
Final EIR, p.50

Implementation: Revisions to final Plan

Mitigation Monitoring: Review of development plans

7. Viewsheds of Heavily Travelled Roads. See Geology/Landforms chapter.

8. Viewshed of Russell Road Off-ramp.

8a. Establish a no-disturbance building setback and tree preservation corridor along Russell Road from Lincoln to the I-80 right-of-way. Suggested depths are:

- 50 feet north of road
- 100 feet south of road

Require a tree preservation buffer along I-80 (eastern side) of 25 feet.

8b. Future development should provide for the realistic preservation of 60% of remaining oak trees falling outside of these corridors or include landscaping/revegetation with native oaks as the dominant feature.

- 8c. See Biotic Resources chapter for additional measures to be applied regarding oak woodland loss (where not superseded by measures here).**

Effectiveness of Measure: These measures are expected to reduce visual impacts to Russell Road on ramp viewshed to a less than significant level.

Implementation: Revisions to final Plan

Mitigation Monitoring: Review of development plans

- 9. Cultural/historic features. See Cultural Resources chapter.**

- 10. Cumulative City plus County buildout. None recommended.**

Effectiveness of Measure: This impact is considered unmitigatable.